

**PRA GMATIC COMPETENCE IN REQUESTS : A CASE OF
THAI ENGLISH TEACHERS**



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ABSTACT

This research describes the use of request strategies in influenced by differences of social status (S) and social distance (D) by Thai English teachers. This involved descriptive qualitative research in which the research participants were fourteen Thai English teachers, they were teachers in school who have teaching English at junior and senior high school. The data were spoken utterances of request strategies elicited though Discourse Completion Test (DCT) scenarios. The subjects were taken using the technique of proporsional random sampling comprising seven male and seven female participants. The research findings showed that Thai English teachers tended to express ability when they made requests. Social Status (S), difference than social distance (D), tended to influence the strategies of request.

Keywords: Pragmatic, Speech Act, Request, Status, Distance.

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ABSTAK

Penelitian ini menjelaskan penggunaan strategi permintaan di dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan stratus sosial (S) dan jarak sosial (J) oleh guru bahasa Inggris thai. Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini terlibat di mana peserta penelitian yang empat belas guru bahasa Inggris thai, mereka adalah guru di sekolah yang telah mengajar bahasa Inggris di smp dan SMA. Data diucapkan ucapan strategi permintaan menimbulkan meskipun scenario pengujian wacana selesai. Subyek diambil dengan menggunakan teknik sampling random proporsional terdiri tujuh laki-laki dan tujuh peserta perempuan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru bahasa Inggris thai cenderung untuk mengekspresikan kemampuan ketika mereka membuat permintaan. Status sosial (S), perbedaan dari jarak sosial (J), cenderung mempengaruhi strategi permintaan.

Kata Kunci: Pragmatis, Tindak Tutur, Permintaan, Status, Jarak.

A. Introduction

Communicative competence is defined as the ability to use grammatically correct sentences in appropriate contexts (Hymes, 1971). In other words, communicative competence subsumes linguistic competence into two parts: pragmalinguistic competence, the ability to use grammar rules to form sentences correctly, and socio-pragmatic competence, the ability to communicate properly according to the social rules of a language. Lack of either of the mentioned competence may cause a mistake in cross-cultural communication, known as pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

As pragmatic competence plays an important role in cross-cultural communication, and EFL speakers have limited chance to acquire pragmatic competence from the existing context, the question is whether EFL speakers can be helped to overcome this restriction. Scholars (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Edwards & Csizer, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; kasper, 1997) have pointed out that EFL classroom may be a potential place for their pragmatic competence. Several research findings in the field of second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Edwards & Csizer, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; house, 1996; Wannaruk, 2005) confirm that explicit teaching of target language pragmatics in EFL classroom is necessary, provided that English teachers have good command of pragmatic competence. If teachers who teach English have poor command of pragmatic competence, it might cause students to also have poor pragmatic competence, which in turn can cause pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication and can lead to communication breakdown (Thomas, 1983).

To use English successfully in international communication, where people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact with each other, communicative competence is truly essential (Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971).

The previous research, Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (in Wijayanto, 2011), reported that EFL learners were more aware of grammatical errors than pragmatic error. Niezgoda and Rover (in Wijayanto, 2011), also reported that

EFL students judged grammatical and pragmatic errors more seriously than the ESL sample did. However low-proficiency learners in both EFL and ESL groups recognized more pragmatic than grammatical errors, whereas high proficiency learners showed the opposite tendency.

B. Related Literature

Request is an illocutionary act where by a speaker (requester) conveys to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is benefit of the speaker. It relates with Searle (1969) who states that request is a directive speech act whose illocutionary purpose is to get the hearer to do something in circumstances in which it is not obvious that he/she will perform the action in the normal course of events.

There are eight request strategies proposed by Trosbog (1995) request is classified into eight strategies which are formulated with regard to situations in which the speaker asks to borrow the hearer's car and presented at levels of increasing directness. Mean while from the scale of directness levels, the request as a face threatening act demanding face-work for its polite realization. The request of hinting strategy is a resort when a speaker does not want to state his/her request intent explicitly. Ability refers to the hearer a capacity to perform the desired acts. Willingness to carry out the desired act serve as compliance gaining strategies by conveying to the requestee that the requester does not take compliance for granted. A request can be made by means of various "suggestory formulae". When employing these formulae, the requester does not question any particular hearer-based condition. The speaker's desires become the local point of the interaction. A requester can choose to focus on speaker based conditions, rather than querying hearer-oriented conditions. Needs is request strategy which expresses the speaker's request more bluntly as a demand. Obligation and necessity strategy is a statement of request where a speaker forces a hearer to do something he/she want for his/her own authority. Performative is statement with requestive

intent which very direct and usually authoritative. Imperative is statement of request which purposed as an order directly.

However, contrastive study by Mei-Chen (1996) reported different results. Mei-Chen carried out a study to investigate similarities and differences in requesting strategies between Taiwanese Mandarin and American English. The study also aimed to examine the claim of universality in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in that a speaker's utterance production is influenced by the three social variables. One hundred and sixty American and an equal amount of Taiwanese took part in the study. They were required to give their responses to a written discourse completion task (WDCT) consisting of 12 situations. Each situation incorporated social status, social distance, and imposition of act. Results showed that these variables did not strongly affect the utterances used by both Taiwanese and American participants. Mei-Chen suggested that other variables, such as social rules in each culture and communication styles could be reasons the deviation of request making.

Aside from the findings from her own study, Mei-Chen (1996) also found the same results from previous research investigating the role of social status, social distance, and the imposition of act (e.g. Wierzbicka (1985), Ide (1989), Matsumoto (1989), Gu (1990), and Mao (1994)). These studies suggest that the theory of politeness universality made by Brown and Levinson has to be reconsidered. These three types of social variables only played a minor role in the speakers' decision on linguistic expressions. In some studies (e.g. Gu (1990), Matsumoto (1989)), it was found that the rules of politeness could not be applied because of cultural differences.

The social distance of the people in the given situations affected the utterances produced by the participants. These two social factors were believed having an influence on speakers' linguistic choices (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speech act of request has received great interest from researchers in the field of pragmatics. It has been studied extensively because it is regarded as one of the most face-threatening speech acts. Non-native

speakers are likely to make mistakes and lose face if they fail to make an appropriate request (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

C. Research Methods

The type of research is descriptive research, because to describe the type of request strategies used by Thai English teachers. This is descriptive research which investigated the use of speech act of request used by Thai English teachers, they were teachers in school who have teaching English at junior and senior high school. Proportional random sampling was involved. The data were spoken utterances of request strategies elicited through Discourse Completion Test (DCT) scenarios. The DCT scenarios were based on social status and social distance. The scenarios of DCT were written in English language and Thai language as to make the DCTs to be more comprehensible to the subjects of the study.

D. Result and Discussion

1. The Request strategies used by Thai English teachers

Request strategies used by participants are ability, willingness, permission, wishes, needs, obligation, performative, and imperative.

a. Ability

The indirect request absolutely was categorized as questioning ability. It can be seen on the words that used in the sentence. There were swearing word “can”, “could”, and “?” considered as the refined word. The condition of ability refers to the hearer’s capacity to perform the desired act. The inherent capacities of the requestee, both physical and mental, and the external circumstances related to time, place, etc, of action, for example:

Excuse me. Could I borrow your lecture notes from yesterday, please?

b. Willingness

The response should be the indirect request because include questioning of willingness. Questioning concerning the hearer's willingness to carry out the desired act serve as compliance gaining strategies by conveying to the requestee that requester does not take compliance for granted, for example:

Mary. Would you mind help me my book from the living room, please?

c. Permission

The request of the DCT is questioning of permission. Questioning concerning the hearer's permission to carry out desired act serve as compliance gaining strategies by conveying to the requestee that the requester doesn't take compliance for granted. Another way of asking about the hearer's permission to do something is by making a request for permission. This involves a shift of focus alluding explicitly to the requester as the beneficiary or recipient of an activity instead of mentioning the requestee as the agent of the action, for example:

Excuse me. May I borrow your lecture notes, please?

d. Wishes

The strategy of request, this is categorized as statement of speaker's wishes and desires because when the speaker spoke, she only focused in her condition. So it made her desire become the main point in the interaction, for example:

I would like some more water, please.

e. Needs

The indirect request is statements of speaker's needs and demands. It is a request strategy which expresses the speaker's request more bluntly as a demand, for example:

Mary, I need my book from the living room table please?

f. Obligation

The request of the DCT is direct request of obligation and necessity. Obligation and necessity strategy is a statement of request where a speaker forces a hearer to do something he/she want for his/her own authority. The structure of obligation and necessity usually marked with should, ought to, have to and must, for example:

I want to permit to my boss if I must to come my friend's wedding party.

g. Performative

The direct request is performative request. Performatives is statement with requestive intent which very direct and usually authoritative. It usually uses a performative verb such as ask, request, command, order ect, for example:

Emmy, I request you to turn down the music.

h. Imperative

The request strategy of utterance, it is categorized as imperative because the speaker commands the hearer to do something and it should be obeyed by the hearer because he/she power over the hearer, for example:

Mary, I forgot my book in the living room. Please bring it to me.

2. The influence of Social Status

a. Close-Equal/Lower/Higher

All research participants used the eight strategies. However status difference influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. Permission was mostly applied in close-lower request with slight difference in frequencies. Close-equal request also used ability. nevertheless the frequency was much less often than was close-lower request. The second high strategy used by the

participants was ability. In this strategy, participants used it in close-equal request most frequently. The third high strategy was willingness, which was used mostly by participants in close-higher request. wishes, needs and imperative were used the less often among the eight strategies. The table shows that participants used those strategies more often in close-equal request.

b. Familiar-Equal/Lower/Higher

All research participants used the eight strategies. However status difference influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. Ability strategy was mostly used by the participants when the requestee were familiar but higher in status. However, when the requests were higher, the use of ability strategy was the least compared to equal requests. willingness strategies were mostly used to the requests who were equal to the requests. However, the frequency of using willingness strategies was the most among all strategies used by the participants. However, permission and obligation strategies were used the mostly when the requester was familiar and higher. However, imperative strategy was adopted in the some frequency both to familiar and equal requests.

c. Unfamiliar-Equal/Lower/Higher

All research participants used the eight strategies. However status difference influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. All strategies were used by the participants. Ability strategy was used very highly by the participants, however, the most frequent was used to higher requests. The participants adopted the ability strategy in the same frequency to the equal and lower requests. The participants employed willingness strategies frequency when the requests were lower and higher, however the use of willingness strategies was more frequent to the lower requests and the lest was to equal requests. permission, needs, and imperative strategies were employed mostly by the participants to equal requests, however

permission strategy was used the least to higher requests while needs and imperative strategies was the least frequent used to lower requests.

3. The influence of Social Distance

a. Equal-Close/Familiar/Unfamiliar

All research participants used the five strategies. However distance influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. Ability strategies were used the most frequent when the requester was unfamiliar and the requestees were equal. However, willingness strategies were used the most frequent when the requester was familiar and equal. However, permission strategies were used the most frequent when the requester was close and equal. needs strategy were mostly used when the requesters were unfamiliar-equal and close-equal to the requestees, while imperative strategy was used mostly when the requesters were familiar and equal.

b. Lower-Close/Familiar/Unfamiliar

All research participants used the six strategies. However distance difference influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. There were variations of pragmalinguistics of making request when the requestees were lower to the requesters. The participants employed ability strategies the most frequent to the unfamiliar and familiar requestees. willingness strategies were employed the most frequent by the participants to unfamiliar requestees. permission, wishes, and needs strategies were employed mostly by the participants to close requestees, nonetheless, imperative strategies were employed mostly by the participants to familiar requestees.

c. Higher-Close/Familiar/Unfamiliar

All research participants used the six strategies. However distance difference influenced the ways the teachers used the strategies in terms of their frequencies. The participants were lower and the requestees

were higher status than the requesters, ability strategies were employed mostly when the participants were unfamiliar to the requestees, however, willingness strategies were employed mostly when the participants were close and unfamiliar to the requesters. However, permission strategies were employed mostly when the participants were familiar to the requestees. needs and imperative strategies were employed mostly by the participants to close requestees, nonetheless, obligation strategies were employed mostly by the participants to familiar requestees.

4. Discussion

a. Request Strategies

The writer discusses of request strategies in Thai English teachers and found 126 data includes first is ability which is indirect request strategy that refers to the hearer's capacity to carry out the desired act. The request strategy of ability considers the hearer's capacity to perform the desired act. There are 34.12% or 43 data of ability. The second is willingness. It is an indirect request strategy which refers to the hearer's willingness to carry out the desired act serve as compliance gaining strategies by conveying to the requestee that requester does not take compliance for granted. The writer found 18.25% or 23 data of willingness. The third is permission. It is a request strategy which refers to the speaker aims to the hearer alluding explicitly. The hearer's to do what speaker's want. The writer found 24.60% or 36 data of permission. The other type is statement of wishes. The strategy of request, this is categorized as statement of speaker's wishes and desires because when the speaker spoke, she only focused in her condition. So it made her desire become the main point in the interaction. The writer found 1.58% or 2 data of wishes. The next is statement of needs. It is a request strategy which expresses the speaker's request more bluntly as a demand. Then there are 6.34%

or 8 data of needs. The sixth type is obligation. It is direct request of obligation and necessity. Obligation and necessity strategy is a statement of request where a speaker forces a hearer to do something he/she want for his/her own authority. The structure of obligation and necessity usually marked with should, ought to, have to and must. The writer found 07.93% or 1 data of obligation. The other type is performative. It is a request strategy which explicitly states the requestive intent which very direct and usually authoritative. It usually uses a performative verb such as ask, request, command, order ect. There are 07.93% or 1 data of performative, and the last type is imperative request. It is a request strategy it was included strategy of request as imperative. Imperative is statement of request which proposed as an order directly. In the order, there is an authority that must be obeyed. It can be if the speaker has power over the hearer. The writer found 12.69% or 16 data of imperative.

b. Social Status

The writer also discusses about the influence of social status. It is used to supports the problem in analyze the type of request strategy. It is the classification of social status. First, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of equal. Second, he finds 33.33% or 42 data of lower. Last, he finds 33.33% or 42 data of higher. This social status was believed having an influence on speakers' consideration social status to determine the degree of politeness to use. It was found that social status had a great effect on the request strategies utilized by the Thai students.

c. Social Distance

The research question asked whether the social distance of the people in given situations affected the utterances produced by the participants. This is the classification of social distance. First, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of close. Second, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of familiar. Last, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data

of unfamiliar. This social distance was believed having an influence on speakers' consideration social distance to determine the degree of politeness to use. The research found out that influence of social distance. Ability was mostly employed by requester to unfamiliar requestee although they equal and close. Perhaps the participants did not want to threat the face of the requestee. Therefore, difference status and distance affect the request strategies used by the participants.

E. Conclusion and Suggestion

1. Conclusion

a. Request Strategies

The writer finds 126 data of request strategies used by Thai English teachers are various. Although Thai English teachers request strategies were used, they were in frequencies such as, ability (34,12%), willingness (18,25%), permission (24,60%), wishes (1,58%), needs (6,34%), obligation (07,93%), performative (07,93%), and imperative (12,69%).

b. Social Status

The contribution of social status to the way the participant elicit their request strategy was also found in this study of social status (equal, lower, higher). First, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of equal. Second, he finds 33.33% or 42 data of lower. Last, he finds 33.33% or 42 data of higher.

c. Social Distance

The writer classifies of social distance (close, familiar, unfamiliar). First, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of close. Second, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of familiar. Last, the writer finds 33.33% or 42 data of unfamiliar.

2. Suggestion

Based on the finding of types of strategy used by the character in request, the writer gives the following suggestions:

- a. To the English teachers, they can suggest their students to analyze language phenomenon by using pragmatics theory, especially in the types of request with their forms and intentions.
- b. To future researchers, the writer hopes this research can be reference to analyze the other research, especially in the same topic. There are many data that can be used to present the analysis of request. The future researcher can take the other source likes movie (especially in aristocratic setting) or real conversation in order to be useful for subsequent research. He/she probably can analyze the type of request by seeing the change of attitude and expression on the face that can't be found in this research. The writer also recommended analyze in authority figures of each participant of request.

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